Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

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September 30, 2025

From Helene to Hope

one year since Hurricane Helene, shared values strengthen recovery

"We do this work not because our clients are Jewish, but because we are."
Stephan Kline, NECHAMA

At a national disaster recovery summit in February, CEO Stephan Kline spoke simply about NECHAMA's mission. His words resonated with Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold, Week of Compassion's Associate Director for Domestic Disaster Response; she felt an immediate kinship with that clear and descriptive purpose and recognized her Disciples colleagues and ecumenical partners in it as well. Nechama is the Hebrew word for comfort or consolation, and NECHAMA Jewish Response to Disaster, "rooted in the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), engages volunteers in disaster relief, rebuilds people's lives, provides comfort and hope, and represents the Jewish people and our values."

As Week of Compassion holds fast to a mission of *working with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world,* toward the vision of *a world where God's people transform suffering into hope*, Stephan and Caroline were inspired to explore partnership that could find depth and strength in shared values. The massive recovery efforts in western North Carolina following Hurricane Helene (September 26, 2024) brought just the right opportunities into view.

Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida and moved across Georgia into the Appalachian mountain range, bringing record-breaking rain across Western North Carolina, an area that does not have experience with hurricanes. This historic rainfall caused major flooding, downed trees, and mudslides that wreaked havoc on infrastructure, homes, and waterways – damage totaling nearly $60 billion. More than 100 deaths were attributed directly to the impacts of the storm in Western North Carolina, with many more indirect casualties.

DISCIPLES RESPOND TO HURRICANE HELENE THROUGH WEEK OF COMPASSION

across Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina:

- 88 household solidarity grants
- 9 congregational solidarity grants
- 4 community support grants
- 15 long-term recovery grants, supporting community-led recovery
- 400+ volunteers in North Carolina

Volunteers are still needed!
Work with partners in Florida or North Carolina this fall/winter, or in 2026.
WeekOfCompassion.org/Volunteer

While storm data is a very real measure and depicts the weight of the devastation, it is the outpouring of compassionate and faithful action that leaves the biggest mark on the land and the people now, just one year later.

In collaboration with Christmount, the Disciples camp and conference center located in Black Mountain NC, Week of Compassion has helped coordinate over 400 volunteers to work on campus repairs and recovery



efforts in the wider community. NECHAMA was one of the community recovery partners overseeing cleanup and early repair efforts for residents whose homes were damaged by the storm.

In the current national climate, deeply polarized along political, religious, and social lines, difference is deployed as a barrier, separating people from each other, and separating people in need from available resources, to frequently dire results. But in moments of crisis, the resilient human spirit recalls what Week of Compassion and NECHAMA know: compassion knows no boundaries.

Shared values of compassion, dignity, resilience, and local leadership made partnership possible. While each organization's work and focus is unique and engages responses from its own congregations most directly, the chance for Disciples volunteers to serve through Jewish-led organizations meant that both the unique identity and the common mission could be in focus at the same time.





Rev. Jonathan Webster organized a region-wide trip for churches from the Christian Church in Virginia. Reflecting on the experience of partnering with NECHAMA he said, "We as Disciples of Christ are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. How can we have wholeness without including all of our brothers and sisters, all of our siblings? It's important to work alongside folks of different faith groups. Our goal is not to proselytize or evangelize. Our goal is to work alongside and see where the great universal Spirit is moving."

The tasks of long-term recovery – clean up, site preparation, supply gathering, work flows – can be tedious and challenging under even the best circumstances. When communities have to wait for the mere restoration of roads and utility services to even begin considering next steps, a heart of compassion and a spirit of generosity are critical, among residents, volunteers, and coordinators alike.

"Talk about experiencing God!" said Rev. Michael Weeks, pastor of Slash Christian Church in Ashland and part of the Virginia regional work trip. As they worked, "the man who lived next door came and told the stories of his mother and father having built the house we were working on, having lived there their whole lives. Now he was honoring them by making this home available to another, this house which had lost its roof in the wind and had gotten wet

inside.



So we were replacing the sheetrock (the roof was done when we arrived), making the home livable again. Working and interacting with NECHAMA teams, and people there in North Carolina who were affected by this, were the most powerful parts of the experience."

Amid our concerns for so many impacted by disaster – whether Hurricane Helene, wildfires in California, or tornadoes in any nearby town – it is good to know that the world's divisions have not overcome the commitment of people of all faiths, different faiths, and even no faith at all, to live in hope, resilience, and unity. When communities come together around shared values, they create bridges that last beyond the crisis.

Week of Compassion and NECHAMA Jewish Response to Disaster know what is possible when compassion draws us together. In every storm and every season of rebuilding, this is the vision that guides Week of Compassion: to transform suffering into hope through acts of courage, compassion, and solidarity. The partnership in North Carolina shows what is possible when faith becomes action and shared values bridge divides. Your prayers, gifts, and service are part of that story – helping communities rise again, stronger than before, and bearing witness to God's promise of wholeness in a fragmented world.

Thank you to our colleagues at NECHAMA for the story-sharing collaboration. You can see their op-ed of this story, published this week in eJewishPhilanthropy (eJP). Thanks also to Jonathan Webster and Michael Weeks for their contributions, and to Michael for the photos used here.

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MISSION : to work with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world
VISION : a world where God's people transform suffering into hope
CORE VALUES : connection - integrity - accompaniment

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